



PHOTO BY JIM ROBERTSON

University of Louisville Police Major David James

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David James just can't get enough of public service. After serving the Louisville Metro Police Department for 20 years, James retired and joined the Kentucky Attorney General's Office as the commissioner of investigations, where he served for four years. But after traveling the state, James decided it was time to come back to where his law enforcement career began — the University of Louisville. James, 53, serves a population of more than 28,000 with the UofL Police Department as its operations major by day. But at night, you'll find him in the council chambers of the Louisville Metro Council building serving District 6 — which includes both the nation's largest Victorian neighborhood and America's 14th poorest neighborhood. Husband to Michelle and dad to Jessica and Jordan, James said while his retirement gig may be hectic some days, it's still a lot of fun.

I balance it all with my electronic office

(he said, as he held up his smart phone). It makes for long days sometimes. I get to work at UofL sometimes at 8 a.m. and then, every other Thursday when we have council day, I don't finish my last meetings with the council until 10 p.m. sometimes. Other days I will run out for lunch and have a council meeting and have to run back to work. It all balances out in the end. I am blessed to have a wife who tolerates me talking to Mr. Jones at 11:00 at night about his street lights being out.

I went to UofL as a much younger person, so I've always been a big, UofL-is-number-one kind of guy. Even when I worked at Metro — I worked narcotics for 15 years — so often I would come here to do undercover work for the university. I started out when I was a student on "cardinal patrol," (now they call it the cadet program) writing parking tickets, escorting students or sitting at the law library. So I was very familiar with the UofL police department even back then. I stayed in contact with the officers there and they were all friends of mine the entire time I was with Metro and at the AG's office. When I retired, it was just natural to go back where I started.

I have been a councilman five years. This is my sixth year. A long time ago when I worked for Metro, I was heavily involved in

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the Fraternal Order of Police and eventually became president. As a member, sitting on different committees, I had lots of interactions with different politicians. Oftentimes I was not impressed with those interactions and thought, "Why aren't we doing more to deal with the drug-abuse issue? The violence issue? Why are we scared to talk about it?"

I think it helps that I'm not a person who has worked at some private business my entire life. Most of my life I have worked for the city of Louisville, so I am intimately aware of the ups, downs and inter-workings of Metro government — all the successes and failures.

Having been a police officer, I have ridden all over the city, to a lot of its' alleys and underbellies. When someone calls and says, "I live at such-and-such place and there's this sidewalk here at this intersection, you've probably never seen it before ..." I can say, "Oh yeah, I've chased somebody down that sidewalk before."

I'm a big cheerleader for the police. But also, if they do something wrong, I'm a big "What the hell were you thinking" guy.

Right now, we are pushing a needle exchange program because of the heroin epidemic we are going through. I have been a strong advocate of that. You have to admit you have a problem to deal with the problem. Cities don't often like to admit there's a problem and that makes it very difficult to deal with it. We have recently engaged with a private contractor to study the police department and determine whether we have enough police officers or not, whether there are enough in plain clothes and if they are all spread out through the neighborhoods correctly.

I recently put forth some legislation here that had to do with pawn shops and electronic reporting. Anyone who goes to a pawn shop to pawn something now has to electronically register it through a program called Leads

Online. All officers can look at it electronically and see if Mrs. Jones' ring was pawned. When doing it by hand there was a card you had to fill out and someone had to go look at the cards every now and then, and by that time, it's already gone.

Yes, I would recommend serving as a city councilman to other officers. It just continues on with your public service, but allows you to do it with a different hat and look at issues from a different angle.

At the end of each day, I'd like to say 'I hope I helped somebody today.' I hope my office helped make somebody's life a little better today in dealing with whatever they had to deal with.' Dealing with Metro government in all of its 6,000 employees can be a big maze to work through, and I want to make that easier for people.

When I joined the police department, they asked me why I wanted to be a police officer. At the time, there were about 3,500 people applying for the job. I thought, "I have to say something different. I need them to remember me." So I said something similar to what I said about helping people and then said, "another upside would be maybe I won't get as many speeding tickets." Apparently it worked.

University policing is a little bit different. You are working with a goal in mind of helping these students become successful. The students' number one goal is to get an education and make their parents happy. Sometimes they do something stupid or drink too much, but they're learning. They're still growing up. We are trying to make sure they stay safe and that we can find a way to make them still be successful and not have their interaction with the criminal justice system be something that is going to last them their entire lives.

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